STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JANE F. GARVEY, ADMINISTRATOR OF THE FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION CONCERNING EFFORTS TO REDUCE AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL DELAYS, MAY 10, 2001.

Chairman Hutchison, Senator Rockefeller, Members of the Subcommittee, it is a pleasure to appear before you today to discuss the topic of airline delays and capacity. Throughout the past two years the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has been working to improve the efficiency of the air traffic system, while at the same time, maintain the highest standards of safety. That safety is, and should remain, of paramount importance is clearly supported by every member of the aviation community. I am very pleased to share with you the role we at the FAA are taking to lead the effort to provide a safe and reliable air traffic system.

Delays have significant financial, scheduling, service, and competition consequences for airlines and result in understandable frustration for their passengers. The issue of delays is very complex. There are many conditions that can cause delays: bad weather, inoperable runways, airport capacity limitations, aircraft equipment problems, airline maintenance and flight crew problems, and air traffic equipment outages. Because of the varied causes for delays, we know that they will never be totally eliminated. Nevertheless, it is the job of the FAA, the airlines, and airports to strive to minimize delays to the greatest extent possible, without compromising safety.

In light of the flight delays our nation experienced in 1999, we recognized that we needed to establish a collaborative planning process between the FAA and users of the National

Airspace System (NAS). We created the Spring/Summer 2000 plan, a collaborative effort developed by industry, labor, and government. The plan maximized the use of available airspace, improved communications between the FAA and aviation system users, and expanded the use of new technology. All of this was designed to improve predictability for airlines operations during severe weather.

The Spring/Summer plan was designed as a delay management plan because, as I've stated, we know we can never eliminate delays. However, it was hoped that the plan would assist us do a better job of collaborative decision-making to better manage the airspace so that the flying public has some expectation of predictability. We know that centralized decision-making, unprecedented collaboration, common weather information – what we refer to as the playbook – is absolutely the right approach. While delays did increase in 2000 from the previous year, along with the number of flights and airline passengers, we do know that our collaborative approach did make a difference. Some airlines informed me that even with the increase in severe weather days in 2000, our collaborative efforts enabled them to better plan and execute operations as well as to inform passengers in advance of severe weather. This is the key to our Spring/Summer plan efforts in 2001, which includes training over 3,000 controllers, supervisors, and airline dispatchers. In addition, I am happy to report that Nav Canada now participates in our conference calls with the airlines and has worked to develop routes that will accommodate approximately 400 additional flights per day. I am hopeful that this, in addition to access to additional military airspace off the east coast, will assist us in achieving greater air traffic efficiencies this spring and summer.

What the past few years have demonstrated is that, right now, supply and demand for capacity are out of balance, and result in delays. How this gap is managed is very complex and cannot be solved by government alone, but the FAA is committed to lead this effort. In order to do so, we knew we needed better information specific to the root causes of the problem, and could tell us how capacity enhancements at key airports would affect the entire NAS.

Toward that end, the FAA recently released its report on Capacity Benchmarks. The report provides data for 31 airports across the country. This report provides valuable data that we hope will be used to assist the FAA, airports, airlines, and other system users in making informed decisions and investments that can ultimately help better manage the ever increasing demand for capacity, while at the same time minimize unavoidable delays. The report documents what Members of Congress, as frequent fliers of the system, know intuitively; that there are a handful of airports at which demand exceeds capacity and where, in adverse conditions, the resulting delays have impacts throughout the NAS.

While the report on Capacity Benchmarks provides us with valuable data upon which important decisions can be made, we have other, tactical and strategic measures underway to improve efficiency of the air traffic control system. In addition to the Spring/Summer 2001 plan, we have identified other tactical measures. For example, we have identified seven choke points centered in the congested airspace between the

"triangle" of Boston, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. We are implementing 21 action items to address these choke points. Eleven of these initiatives have been completed and continue to be measured for effectiveness. For example, departures going west out of New York airports have experienced 25% fewer unplanned departure stops. (An unplanned departure stop occurs when the departure radar controller directs the towers to stop all departures due to weather, workload and/or complexity issues.) We have also reduced congestion for flights flowing north out of New York airports, thus reducing departure stops by 37%

Five additional action items are mid-term initiatives with expected completion dates between June and December of this year. Five more are long-term actions requiring either phased in implementation, future funding, equipment, or international agreements. Our goal is to complete these remaining items by the summer of 2002.

On April 30, 2001, we opened three new sectors at Cleveland Center, the most congested Air Traffic Control Center in the nation. We are working to establish a total of 14 new sectors by the end of the year, seven of which have been opened, to ease congestion and speed traffic flows in the Great Lakes corridor and into New York. New routes have been developed throughout the "triangle" to improve the traffic flows. The System Command Center, in consultation with users, tactically restricts certain flights through this area to improve sector capacity. As a result, we can accommodate more flights and, overall, aircraft fly more efficiently. We have identified a total of 19 new sectors which will make significant differences in traffic flows for flights in Boston, Chicago,

Washington, D.C., and New York, as well as other northeast airports by the Summer of 2002.

The FAA is also working to determine where our operating, capital, and research investments should be best distributed to meet our strategic goals, including those pertaining to system efficiency. A better understanding of how these three resources enable us to achieve goals will help us make more effective decisions for the near and long term.

For the first time, the FAA has, with the cooperation with the aviation industry, developed a far-reaching 10 year National Airspace System Operational Evolution Plan (OEP). This involved a coordinated effort within the FAA and systematic collaboration with the airlines, airports, and other members of the aviation community. This plan directly addresses the passenger delays identified in our capacity benchmarks study.

The plan calls for changes in how aircraft operate to better match available capacity to meet demand; a redesign of the airspace to accommodate greater numbers of aircraft while maintaining safety; deployment of new technology to increase flexibility; construction of new runways; and new procedures to improve management of delays.

This is a fundamental change in the manner in which we conduct business. The OEP is about commitment, accountability, and deliverability. While we at the FAA are making certain commitments, the OEP will require our partners, particularly the airlines, to make

significant investments in avionics equipment and pilot training for this effort in expanding system capacity. That is why we have worked so diligently in getting industry support for the OEP. We have had two industry days and have posted the OEP on our web site so that we can get comments from a broad range of system users. We are reviewing comments as they are received and plan to issue a final OEP in June.

More strategically, we are redesigning our nation's airspace and air traffic control automation. The National Airspace Redesign will be completed for the entire country in 2006, but we are starting in the New York and mid-Atlantic areas where we expect tangible benefits within four years. The most congested and complicated airspace is east of the Mississippi River. Because this airspace poses the most challenges, it is the initial focus of our redesign. Our goal is to establish comprehensive processes and procedures to ensure adaptable and flexible airspace that meet future demands.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the entire FAA, from my air traffic management team, to my modernization team, to our airport folks, the FAA recognizes our dual responsibilities of safety and efficiency when it comes to reducing aviation delays. I am fortunate to have a highly dedicated workforce -–our controllers, our technicians, and our headquarters staff – and we are all working aggressively and cooperatively with airlines and airports to meet these challenges.

Madam Chairman, I will be happy to answer your questions at this time.